

# ...About CITES Meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs)

## What Is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international treaty aimed at regulating the worldwide trade in threatened and potentially threatened species. CITES became effective July 1, 1975, with the United States as one of the original 10 Party countries. There are currently 145 CITES Party countries. CITES is administered through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. English, French, and Spanish are the official working languages of CITES.

CITES provides for a permanent Secretariat. The Secretariat: 1) provides Party countries with trade information and technical support; 2) acts as a liaison among Party countries; 3) contracts trade studies; 4) informs governments and the public about CITES wildlife trade developments; 5) investigates possible CITES violations and trade threats to wildlife; and 6) organizes meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs).

CITES is implemented in the United States under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the lead agency for this implementation.

## How Do The Standing, Animals, And Plants Committees Work?

At COP6 in 1987, the Parties passed a resolution that reestablished the CITES Standing Committee and created the CITES Animals and Plants Committees. Each Committee meets several times between COPs to work on resolving issues carried over from past committee meetings and COPs, as well as

identifying new issues in need of resolution.

The Standing Committee provides the Secretariat with policy and operational direction concerning CITES implementation. The Animals and Plants Committees provide scientific expertise on species, develop and maintain standardized lists of species, and review trade impacts on species of particular concern. The United States is an active participant in all CITES matters and attends committee meetings.

## What Is A COP?

The CITES Parties meet approximately every 2 years at a COP. During this 2-week long meeting, they review and vote on 1) proposed resolutions and decisions to improve the effectiveness of CITES and 2) amendments to the listings of protected species on the CITES Appendices. They also resolve policy and implementation issues.

Each COP is hosted by a Party country. Attendants include delegations from the Party countries, representatives of the CITES Secretariat and UNEP, and approved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who attend as observers.

## What Is Involved In Preparing For A COP?

Any CITES Party country may submit agenda items, proposed resolutions, and/or proposed amendments to the Appendices for consideration by the Parties at a COP. Parties must submit them to the Secretariat 150 days prior to the COP. The Secretariat, Standing Committee, Animals Committee, and Plants Committee may also submit agenda items and proposed resolutions

at a COP. Working groups established at a COP or committee meeting may also submit such items.

Prior to the start of a COP, the Secretariat provides the Parties with all of the agenda items, proposed resolutions, and proposed amendments to the Appendices submitted for consideration. Each Party reviews this information and develops negotiating positions.

## How Does The United States Prepare For A COP?

The U.S. Government begins to prepare for a COP almost immediately after the previous COP ends. Through a series of Federal Register notices and public meetings, FWS includes the public in the process.

Approximate schedule for COP preparation:

- 22 months prior to the COP, FWS publishes a public notice in the Federal Register requesting recommendations on proposed amendments to the Appendices.

- 16 months prior to the COP, FWS publishes a public notice requesting recommendations on agenda items and proposed resolutions.

- 10 months prior to the COP, FWS publishes a notice announcing agenda items, proposed resolutions, and proposed amendments to the Appendices that the United States is considering submitting for the COP. The notice asks for public comment and schedules a public meeting.

- 9 months prior to the COP, FWS holds a public meeting to discuss proposed U.S. submissions for the COP.

■ 5 months prior to the COP, FWS provides the Secretariat with U.S. submissions for consideration at the COP.

■ 4 months prior to the COP, FWS publishes a notice announcing agenda items, proposed resolutions, and proposed amendments to the Appendices that the United States submitted for the COP.

■ 2 months prior to the COP, FWS publishes a notice announcing proposed U.S. negotiating positions on agenda items, proposed resolutions, and proposed amendments to the Appendices submitted by other Parties for the COP. The notice asks for public comment and schedules a public meeting.

■ 1½ months prior to the COP, FWS holds a public meeting to discuss proposed U.S. negotiating positions.

■ Just prior to the COP, FWS publishes a notice announcing final U.S. negotiating positions for the COP.

### **What Happens At A COP?**

Each Party country may send a delegation to the COP to discuss the issues for consideration. Representatives of the Secretariat attend and are responsible for taking the minutes of the meeting and providing the delegations with copies of the meeting documents.

Approved observers may attend all Plenary and committee sessions (with

the exception of sessions of the Budget Committee) and comment in these sessions on any of the issues. However, they are not permitted to vote on any of the proposals raised. In addition, the U.S. delegation holds daily meetings during the COP to brief all U.S. NGOs on current developments.

The business of the COP is discussed in sessions of the Plenary, Committee I, Committee II, and the Budget Committee.

### **The Plenary**

The first session of the Plenary opens the COP, establishes the rules of procedure, and adopts the COP agenda and working programs. The COP then breaks into committees where most of the issues for consideration of the Parties are discussed. Although the committees make recommendations to the Plenary, the Plenary is the only forum where amendments and resolutions are actually approved. The Plenary meets again near the end of the COP to resolve outstanding issues, finalize recommendations from the committees, select the host country of the next COP, and close the meeting. During the closing session of the Plenary, Parties may reopen discussion of issues from any of the other committees before approval.

All Party countries with delegations present at the COP may vote “yes,” “no,” or “abstain” on any of the items put to a vote in the committees and the Plenary.

Party countries without a credentialed delegation at a COP do not vote at that COP.

### **Committee I**

Agenda items related to proposed amendments to the Appendices and other scientific issues are discussed in Committee I. Party countries may propose to list, uplist, downlist, or delist species in Appendix I, II, and III. Committee I also considers proposals regarding export quotas and ranching operations. Delegates of each Party may attend. In order for a proposed amendment to the Appendices to be adopted, it must be approved by consensus or by a 2/3 majority vote of the Parties voting. The determinations reached in Committee I are held until the closing Plenary session for final approval.

### **Committee II**

Agenda items related to CITES implementation, including the proposed resolutions, are discussed in Committee II. Each Party may send delegates to sessions of this Committee. Resolutions are adopted by consensus or a 2/3 majority vote of the Parties voting. Often, a proposed resolution is revised based on discussions in Committee II and submissions from working groups, and the revised version is then adopted.

Based on discussions of a given agenda item in Committee II, a decision may also be adopted. A decision directs the Secretariat, the Standing Committee, the Animals Committee, or the Plants Committee to take an action related to CITES implementation. Conversely, a resolution recommends that the Parties take an action that interprets the text of CITES. The determinations reached in Committee II are held until the closing Plenary session for final approval.

### **Budget Committee**

CITES budget issues are discussed in the Budget Committee. This committee is not open to NGOs.

Before the conclusion of the COP, several amendments to the Appendices, resolutions, and decisions usually are adopted by the Parties. It is then the responsibility of the Parties and the Secretariat to implement them.

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